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ABSTRACT

In the late 1950's and early 1960's an ongoing program in liberal arts was introduced using the study - discussion method, popularly known as Living Room Learning. The purposes of the groups were to draw basic information from specially prepared reading and audio-visual materials and to stimulate participants to think better for themselves through discussion. Discussion leaders were community volunteers trained in special workshops. Meetings were held in private homes in the community for eight to twelve sessions of about two hours. Groups averaged sixteen to eighteen participants. The program grew with funding and other support until it serviced annually over 1,500 participants in 77 British Columbia communities on an annual budget of $25,000. The program was discontinued when the University sponsor ruled that Extension Programs must be self-supporting. An effort to reintroduce the program at a later date was short-lived. An 11-item bibliography is included. (SC)

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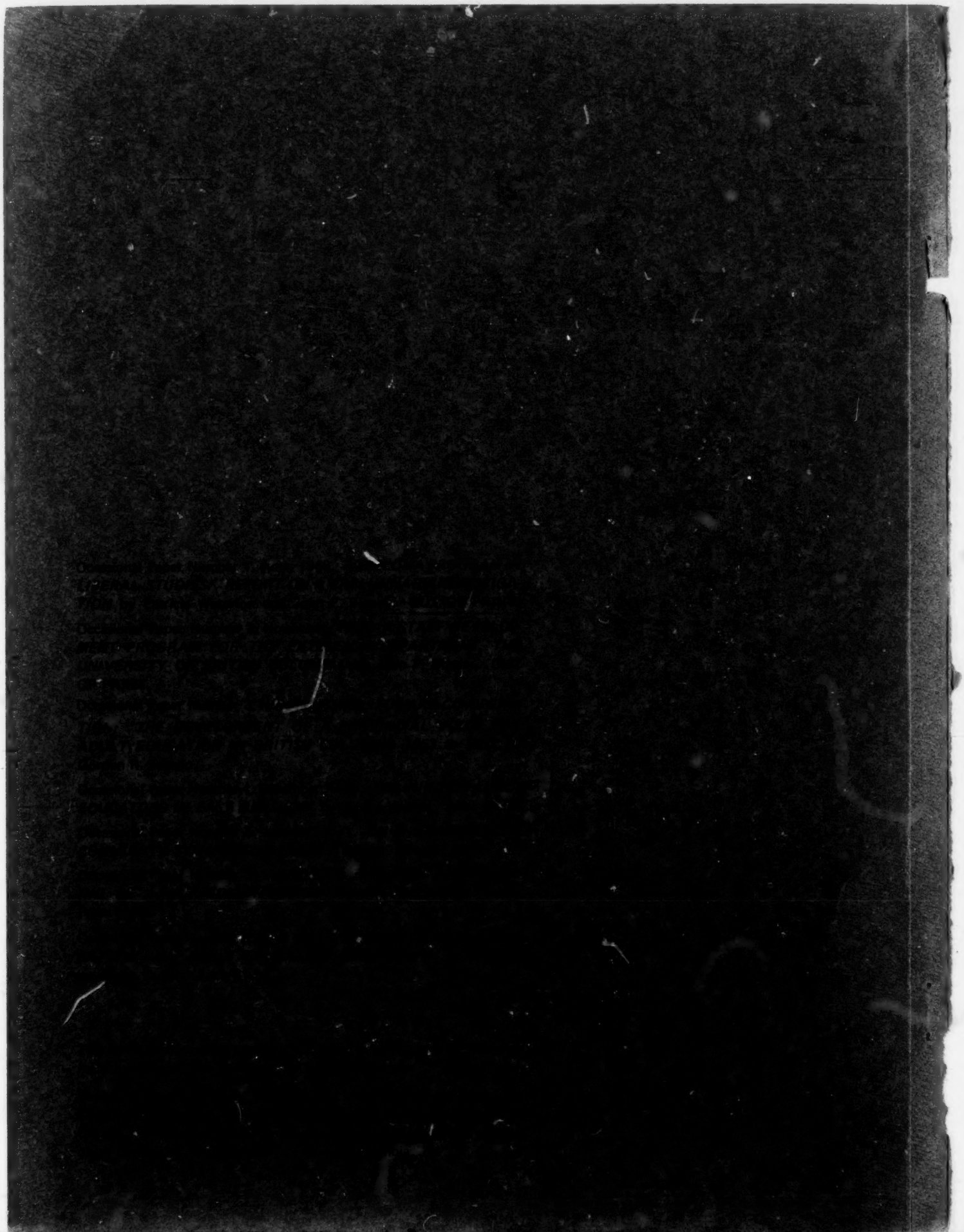

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LIVING ROOM LEARNING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Centre for Continuing Education
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada, 1973

This Report was prepared by Knute Buttedahl
U.B.C. Centre for Continuing Education

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ABOUT THIS SERIES AND THIS PAPER

This Occasional Paper is the eighth in a series being published by our Centre for Continuing Education. Our aim is to contribute to the field of adult education by publishing monographs which originate here at The University of British Columbia and are deemed to be worthy of reaching a wider audience than would otherwise be the case.

The author of this paper, my colleague Mr. Knute Buttedahl, joined our staff in 1957 to take on the difficult task of organizing a study-discussion program in the liberal arts. We were in a position to attempt this because we had been fortunate enough to receive a grant from an American Foundation, The Fund for Adult Education, for that purpose. That the task was difficult and required specialized skills had been demonstrated in several centres in North America, where even with the help of such grants, the attempt to create such a program had failed, or was achieving at best marginal success. It was against this background that Mr. Buttedahl assumed this assignment and proceeded in the course of the subsequent four years to create an outstanding program. He did not do it all himself - and indeed that was one of the keys to his success - but the fact is that the program succeeded here to an extent reached in few, if any other centres.

In this paper Mr. Buttedahl reviews our experience with "Living Room Learning", mainly in the period 1957 to 1964. He examines the procedures, methods and techniques, and problems involved, drawing conclusions which he feels will be of use and interest to other practitioners.

Gordon R. Selman
Director

LIVING ROOM LEARNING
in British Columbia

In the late 1950's and early 1960's a new trail was blazed in programming for adults in British Columbia. Thousands of men and women in every corner of the province became involved in a study and discussion program conducted by The University of British Columbia under the popular title of "Living Room Learning".

This summary is an attempt to record for posterity the Living Room Learning story, before the trail disappears completely. The trail already is getting cold.

The synopsis which follows is based upon a few meager records extant in the Centre for Continuing Education of The University of British Columbia, augmented by the personal recollections of the writer, who supervised the Living Room Learning program during its initial four years of operation.

This is the story of an exciting dimension to adult programming in British Columbia, which flourished for seven years before financial exigencies led to its demise, and about an unsuccessful attempt at its resuscitation.

AN OVERVIEW

The UBC Department of University Extension (now the Centre for Continuing Education) had an extensive record of programming in the liberal arts, but prior to 1957 there was no ongoing program using the study-discussion method. In August of that year, The Fund for Adult Education "approved a grant $32,000 to The University of British Columbia for the three-year period

September 1, 1957, through August 31, 1960, for establishing of a liberal arts centre at the University .....". This grant was assigned by the University to the Department of University Extension. Mr. Knute Buttedahl was engaged to administer and supervise the establishment of a Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts which soon became known by the popular title "Living Room Learning".

A Summary

The program brought the University out into the community. These were not lectures or classes, but round-table discussion groups, stimulated by specially prepared books, dramatic recordings, and films.

Trained leaders kept the discussion on the track. No one tried to supply answers to all the questions raised. The purpose of the groups was to draw basic information from the readings and the audio-visual material and to stimulate participants to think better for themselves through discussion. The discussion leaders usually were recruited from among volunteers in the community and trained in special workshops. The program, therefore, was not restricted to the availability of university lecturers.

Within the three-year grant period, Living Room Learning had expanded to involve over 1,300 participants annually in over 40 communities throughout British Columbia. In April, 1960, the University Board of Governors approved the incorporation of the study-discussion project into the regular program of the Department of University Extension.

For four additional years the program grew and flourished until eventually it serviced annually over 1,500 participants in some 77 British Columbia communities. (See Appendix "A" and "B"). Then, in 1964, as a result of the University's ruling that Exten-

sion Department programs must become substantially self-supporting, it was reluctantly decided to discontinue the study-discussion program along with a number of other liberal arts activities which required substantial financial subsidy.

The community uproar was significant. For the next few years, dozens of letters were directed to the University pointing out the value and impact which the Living Room Learning program had for the smaller community which was too remote to otherwise benefit from university programs. The UBC Alumni Association also joined in to urge recorsideration of the decision to discontinue this program. Numerous submissions by the Department of University Extension for some support money were to no avail. Faced with the stringent problems of rising enrollment, the University chose not to allocate scarce resources to subsidize a Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts.

Living Room Learning at the height of its operation in British Columbia required an annual budget of about $25,000 of which only about one half was recovered from participant fees.

After some 2½ years of dormancy, the Study-Discussion Program was reintroduced in the Fall of 1966, but on a much smaller scale. In an attempt to make the new Program financially viable, an Independent Study component was added. Much of the community network of volunteers had disappeared. A year of renewed effort produced a total of 20 study-discussion groups and 175 participants. This revival lasted little more than a year before it petered out. Other program needs were too demanding and the Study-Discussion Program at UBC faded into history.

Aims of the Program

To provide focus to the Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts, a set of four fundamental aims were adopted: (1) to

help the participant to understand the culture of which he is a part; (2) to help him think independently, critically, and objectively; (3) to develop his tolerance of opinions and ideas which differ from his own; (4) to develop his skills in communicating with others.

These aims were similar to those developed for study-discussion programs at a number of other institutions. They served as a helpful baseline in developing the operational techniques, the training of discussion leaders, and the production of new packages of materials.

Choice of Name

Very early in the development of the Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts, the popular title of "Living Room Learning" was tested and then adopted. The writer feels that the happy selection of this name did much to capture the imagination of the community. "Living Room Learning" was a catchy "trademark" and had many desirable connotations. It was a gem for publicity and press releases. In 1963, there was a deliberate decision to de-emphasize and discontinue the name Living Room Learning, the rationale being that many study-discussion groups were not meeting in private homes. The writer was then no longer connected with the study-discussion program and only could ineffectively protest what he considered to be an unwise decision.

Staffing

During the first seven years of the Study-Discussion Program, it was administered by one full-time Extension Supervisor with the assistance of an office secretary. From 1957 to 1961, the Supervisor was Knute Buttedahl. In 1961, John P. Blaney assumed responsibility, until 1963 when Fred E. Walden took over for the

final year of operation. When Study-Discussion was reinstituted in 1966, it was assigned to Philip E. Moir.

The only way in which Living Room Learning could handle the organizing and servicing of so many study-discussion groups, was by the maximal use of volunteers.

Faculty Relationships

From the outset, Living Room Learning had the assistance of an ad hoc Faculty Advisory Committee which, particularly in the early stages, helped to formulate objectives and to develop policies. The committee and individual members of the UBC faculty played an important role in the development of additional packaged programs to augment those programs already available commercially.

Materials for Study and Discussion

At the inception of Living Room Learning, a number of "packaged programs" already had been developed, tested, and put into production. Most of these were developed through the efforts of The Fund for Adult Education. Several other packaged programs were available from other sources. As Living Room Learning grew and as many participants returned again and again to register for new groups, the clamour for additional courses was met by the development of new packaged programs at The University of British Columbia. At the same time, the "Living Library" division of the Canadian Association for Adult Education was developing new topics.

At the height of popularity of study-discussion in British Columbia, some 24 topics were available and offered to discussion participants. (See Appendix "C".)

The Role of the Volunteer

In each major community, a volunteer Living Room Learning Coordinator was recruited and trained. Often assisted by a community Advisory Committee, these Coordinators helped the Study-Discussion Program Supervisor to plan, promote, organize, and administer the Living Room Learning groups in their region.

In addition, volunteer discussion leaders were recruited from the community and trained for their role. Contact with these community volunteers was maintained by correspondence and by periodic visits of the Program Supervisor.

The success of Living Room Learning in large part was due to the enthusiasm and loyalty of these volunteers.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Seven years of experience with the Study-Discussion Program taught us many things. Some of our experiences paralleled those of other universities. Some of our conclusions were derived from hard data, while others were in the nature of "educated guesses" based upon experience. Rather than be wholly pragmatic, we tried to base our approach upon substantial adult learning theory. The following comments often will be a blend from several bases and the writer must accept personal responsibility for both the value-judgements and the conclusions.

In general terms, feedback from participants gave us confidence that the study-discussion method provided a worthwhile learning experience. We conducted no systematic study of learning and have no data which purports to indicate that learning took place in these study and discussion groups. However, we constantly

were asking individuals for their reactions to the method, to the leadership, and to the reading materials. Individual comments often were augmented by group evaluation during the final meeting.

It was rare that a participant did not evaluate his experience as "stimulating" or "exciting" or "satisfying". From memory, because no records were maintained, we recall that we usually received a very positive reply from participants when we asked if they felt they had learned anything from the course. Suggestions about leadership and about background readings indicated to us that participants became seriously and deeply involved in their study and discussion activity.

The high incidence of repeat enrollments, with some participants staying in the program for two or three or more years, provided testimony that many adults were finding satisfaction in their study and discussion experience. We received many comments that an attractive aspect of the program was that it was something worthwhile that husbands and wives could do together.

In many ways it was evident to us that the enthusiasm and loyalty of our volunteer discussion leaders and coordinators, also was infused into a significant number of the participants. Possibly because of the intensive and enjoyable social experience which participants encountered in these small discussion groups, the whole study-discussion program in British Columbia seemed to take on many of the attributes of a movement. Those of us who supervised the program witnessed on the part of the participants a vigorous and intensive involvement over a period of time which far exceeded that which we witnessed in other types of adult education activities.

Possibly the details which follow will document some of the uniqueness of the Living Room Learning program.

1. Characteristics of Participants

For a two-year period, the study-discussion program was involved in a Data Collection Project on behalf of The Fund for Adult Education. From 782 participants in 95 groups, we determined the characteristics listed below. In 1961 another study of 115 participants revealed comparative data.

	2 Year Study	1961 Study
AGE		
18 to 29 years	17%	8%
30 to 39 years	35%	32%
40 to 49 years	25%	37%
50 to 59 years	14%	17%
60 years or over	9%	6%
SEX		
Male	36%	31%
Female	64%	69%
FORMAL EDUCATION		
Elementary School	2%	6%
Junior High School	5%	20%
High School completed	36%	37%
Some College	27%	17%
B.A. or equal	16%	17%
Some graduate work	8%	
Advanced degree	6%	3%
OCCUPATIONAL GROUPING*		
Businessman (for self)	4%	20%
Educator	13%	
Executive	7%	
Fine Arts (dance, music, etc.)	2%	-
Salesman	3%	13%
Professional (M.D., lawyer, etc.)	13%	26%
Semi-professional (nurse, etc.)	13%	

*Housewives distributed into occupation of Head of Household.

	2 Year Study	1961 Study
Secretary, Clerk, Office Worker	30%	22%
Other (skilled, construction, service, students, farmers, etc.)	15%	19%

The 1961 study also revealed that 76% of the participants were married, and that 67% had resided in their community for more than 5 years. Among the 115 participants studied, over 90% had participated in other educational courses within the past 3 years.

In both studies, more women than men enrolled. Most participants were 30 years or older and had at least completed high school. Almost half had gone beyond 12 years of schooling. (Our data was not as startling as that reported by a number of American universities which consistently reported at least 80% of their study-discussion participants had schooling beyond high school).

Professional, semi-professional, proprietary, and managerial categories accounted for almost one half of our participants.

It was clear from our data that the Study-Discussion Program attracted a particular kind of audience.

2. Size of Study-Discussion Groups

There are many opinions about the optimum number of people to have in a discussion group. It is commonly accepted that if a group needs to solve problems and reach conclusions, then a smaller group works better. But study-discussion groups in the liberal arts are concerned with a sharing and testing of opinions. Groups must be large enough to bring together a variety of opinions and backgrounds. Sufficient registrations also are necessary to minimize the effect upon the group of individual absenteeism.

The experience of study-discussion programs at other institutions seemed to suggest a small group of 15 to 18 participants was

preferable. There was also the consideration of financial viability as well as the "lack of excitement" when the group was too small.

Therefore, for a variety of reasons, including experience and a survey among participants, Living Room Learning developed a policy of setting the minimum size at 10 in addition to the discussion leader. The most successful groups seemed to achieve excellent results with 16 to 18 participants. Larger groups did function but were a test of the skill of the leader. Experienced leaders seemed able to handle up to 24 members and still allow for sufficient participation by each individual.

There were a few successful exceptions where a Living Room Learning group as small as 6 or 8 participants was "allowed" to proceed after careful explanation to the participants about the hazards they faced in terms of the limited range of opinions and backgrounds reducing the excitement of the discussion and the pronounced effect that absenteeism might have. Several of these smaller groups which elected to go ahead had satisfying experiences, but a few also concluded at the end that they would have been wiser to accept our counsel.

3. Length of Program and of Sessions

The "packaged programs" already developed, tested, and available from several sources, were designed for 8 to 12 sessions. When The University of British Columbia began to develop additional packaged programs for its Living Room Learning groups, it had to develop some rationale for dividing a study-discussion program into a specific number of sessions. After reviewing experiences with the traditional evening class lecture program and after discussion with many of the participants and volunteers in Living Room Learning, it was decided to plan for 10 sessions.

Since the study-discussion groups normally met once a week, this meant that a ten-session program would involve participants for some 2½ months. Rationalizing that busy, mobile adults in the average urban region would be unable to comfortably commit their time beyond a few months into the future, and also being aware of the seasonal rhythm of adult activities, we were comfortable with the choice of 10 weeks as the average life for a Living Room Learning group and feedback from participants reinforced our decision. Some groups expressed interest in continuing for a few additional meetings in order to review or dig deeper into some aspect of the topic. We encouraged such developments and only cautioned the group to get the consent of the host/hostess and of the discussion leader. No additional fee or extra expense was involved.

The length of the individual session had to be sufficient to allow for developing the topic, but not long enough to develop physical and psychological fatigue. We had the experience of other institutions to draw upon as well. Two hours was the length adopted for the individual session. Punctuality was one of the ground rules stressed in Living Room Learning groups. Adults have to make arrangements for transportation, babysitters, and other responsibilities. To start and to adjourn at a definite time was a much-appreciated rule. It was pointed out to volunteers and participants that it is always better to cut discussion at a peak of excitement and enthusiasm, rather than waiting for a doldrum to set in. Besides, it was usual for the hostess to serve coffee immediately after formal adjournment. For those participants who had no need to rush off to meet other commitments, it meant another hour of continued discussion in informal sub-groups and an additional opportunity for the timid to participate.

4. Timing of the Sessions

While a few Living Room Learning groups were organized successfully in the daytime, the bulk of the groups met in the evening. Daytime groups "complained" that they were composed almost exclusively of women and that the resultant discussion was not as exciting as it might have been with a more heterogeneous group.

Monday to Thursday were the popular nights. Only rarely did a group want to meet on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday.

In most communities, the popular demand was to start at 8:00 p.m. and to adjourn punctually for coffee at 10:00 p.m. A few groups decided to introduce coffee during the formal discussion period. We even had reports from a couple of groups who decided amongst themselves to substitute wine for the coffee.

Seasonally, the periods that seemed to fit in well with the rhythm of adult life in most communities, was the Fall peak period when we offered the 8 to 12 week program between late September and early December. What we labelled as our Spring program was offered between late January and early April and recruited fewer participants than the Fall program. Only a few Living Room Learning groups were organized successfully in the May to August period, although this may be due more to the strictures of budget and staff time than to the resistance of potential participants.

5. The Physical Setting

Initially, study-discussion groups were located in a variety of buildings. Being concerned about developing an atmosphere conducive to discussion, we encouraged feedback from participants about the facilities used. The exceptional success of the groups which met in private homes during the first year of operation led to the Program Supervisor concentrating upon securing "living rooms" for most of the study-discussion groups. Although a few

other locations were tried during the second year, the reactions from participants soon convinced us that we got better results from groups meeting in private homes. The study-discussion program became Living Room Learning in practice as well as in name.

It became an established policy to use only private residences. Other community organizations such as YMCA, YWCA, church groups, and certain agencies, still were offered the use of our program materials and experience, and many conducted their own study-discussion groups. These were not advertised among our Living Room Learning offerings to the general public.

This emphasis on location by the first Program Supervisor was abandoned by subsequent Supervisors and in 1963 the name "Living Room Learning" disappeared officially. The rationale for dropping the popular title, which had become a household word in British Columbia, was that many of the study-discussion groups no longer met in private homes. However, as testimony to the effectiveness of the popular title, Living Room Learning is today still the tag applied by many people in British Columbia when they refer to study-discussion programs.

Although meeting in private homes was one of the attractive and unique aspects of the program, we had some misgivings at first. Private homes often were indicators of status and income. We were fearful that the location of a particular home might cut off registrations from a particular socio-economic class. However, we soon abandoned our fears through a process of choosing locations on the basis of geographic distribution and accessibility to the main transportation routes. The resultant mix of homes and the heterogeneity of the participants allayed our fears. Our problem then became one of convincing some prospective host/hostess that their "working-class home" was suitable.

The other important consideration in choosing homes, was to be certain that the living room, or sometimes the recreation room,

was large enough to comfortably handle from 16 to 20 people, seated in a loose circle so that everyone could be seen. Sometimes a few extra chairs had to be borrowed from neighbors or institutions or from participants.

The use of private homes simplified the making of coffee, which soon became a trade mark of Living Room Learning. Hosts and hostesses were recruited on the understanding that they provide coffee (we discouraged elaborate spreads of food) upon adjournment of each session. In the opinion of this writer, the coffee period did much to meld quickly a group of strangers into a friendly, cohesive, discussion group where contrary opinions received a respectful hearing.

6. Recruitment of Volunteers

The first step in most communities was for the Program Supervisor to make a personal visit, often after correspondence with contacts in the region. On-the-spot enquiry and consultation usually led to the identification of someone interested in and capable of becoming the Living Room Learning Coordinator. Such recruitment became easier over the years as word about Living Room Learning filtered into other communities. There were a number of instances where an individual or a group wrote to the university and offered to help if Living Room Learning could be introduced to their community. Thus it was possible to recruit several Coordinators by mail, without a visit by the Program Supervisor being necessary.

In some larger communities the Program Supervisor also organized an Advisory Committee to assist the Coordinator with the making of decisions and to share in some of the tasks of organizing and publicizing Living Room Learning. The Coordinator acted as chairman of this committee. Size of the committees varied from 3 to 10 members. They were drawn from a broad cross-section of

the community. Their names were listed on the promotional brochures, although they were chosen for their interest in the study-discussion program rather than for their prestige in the community. Some Advisory Committee members also became hosts or discussion leaders.

The host/hostess and the discussion leaders were recruited through a number of channels. Some were personally known to the Coordinator, to the Advisory Committee, to the Program Supervisor or to "friends" and study-discussion participants. These people were approached and often enlisted as volunteers. Other people in the community volunteered in response to publicity seeking help.

After some screening, certain volunteers were selected for training as discussion leaders. Hosts/hostesses were chosen with regard to location of their home and their preference for topic in an attempt to distribute locations over a broad area within the community.

Once a program was launched successfully in a community, additional volunteers were recruited from among participants. Discussion leaders and Coordinators were encouraged to be alert to participants who might have potential as future discussion leaders. The criteria used for selecting potential leaders was never very explicit or "scientific". We felt that those who volunteered were usually "self-selecting" and actually had a capacity to be trained as suitable discussion leaders. Observing them as participants often provided a "gut feeling" about their leadership potential. Occasionally volunteers had to be dissuaded because their incapabilities were obvious although their willingness was commendable.

While no accurate record is now available, we can estimate that over 300 people served as discussion leaders in Living Room Learning, at one time or another. In only a few cases was our selection so obviously wrong that we had to replace a discussion leader. In several other cases we found it useful to add a co-leader to assist an inexperienced leader.

7. Coordination of Volunteers

As the program expanded throughout British Columbia, it soon became necessary to establish a special category of volunteer in each community who was given the title of "Living Room Learning Coordinator". The Coordinator was recruited and appointed by the Program Supervisor and served as his liaison and assistant in the local community.

At the height of the program, there were more than 60 coordinators scattered throughout the Province. These men and women assisted in determining the potential of a community in terms of number of groups and topics to be offered. They often were solely responsible for recruiting group hosts (finding locations for group meetings), and for recruiting potential discussion leaders. In larger communities the Coordinator often pulled together an Advisory Committee to help with the decision making.

Brochures and posters were normally designed and printed at the university, but the Coordinator assisted with their distribution and handled local publicity, such as free radio, newspaper, and television announcements, where these media were available.

When the Living Room Learning groups were being formed, the Coordinator registered the participants and issued official receipts, which were transmitted and accounted for to the University.

The kits of reading material were shipped to the Coordinator, who distributed them to the participants. Arranging for film projectors and other equipment and handling emergencies or problems during the discussion season also were part of the task of the Coordinator.

It should be apparent that the phenomenal success of Living Room Learning in British Columbia was due in large measure to the loyal efforts of volunteer Coordinators. One Program Supervisor, stationed at the University and making periodic visits to these

scattered communities, could never have organized and administered such an extensive study-discussion program without the dedication of these local Coordinators.

8. Training the Discussion Leaders

The bulk of the discussion leader training workshops during the initial four years were conducted by the Program Supervisor. This allowed him to assess the capabilities of the volunteers in most communities and facilitated their assignment to a role which would ensure some control over the quality of the discussion leadership. Thus, a few volunteers were identified as being unsuitable for the role of discussion leader. Others were assessed as having leadership potential but needing experience and these volunteers usually were assigned to a group as co-leader with a more experienced leader to provide additional coaching.

It was obvious that the discussion leaders held the key to the success of each Living Room Learning group. Because of the excellence of the discussion leader guides which accompanied most of the "packaged programs", it was not necessary to give training in subject matter. Instead, our attention was concentrated upon training our discussion leaders in group processes.

The typical leadership workshop was conducted early in the season prior to the first meeting of the study-discussion groups. From 6 to 10 hours of training was given in a one or two day workshop. The usual format included a showing of the 21 minute Encyclopedia Britannica film, "How to Conduct a Discussion", followed by a discussion of the 11 points raised in the film. After discussion of discussion techniques, we summarized the philosophy and objectives of Living Room Learning and reviewed how to make use of the discussion leader's guide to the topic and how to organize the agenda for that important first session.

An important aspect of the workshop was to give each participant an opportunity to lead a short practice session followed by group evaluation. The Program Supervisor, as trainer, conducted the whole workshop as a demonstration of the discussion technique. Particularly when time was limited, the primary objective of the workshop was to instill confidence in the volunteers who were about to undertake responsibility for leading a Living Room Learning group. Having given some considerable attention to choosing discussion leaders who seemed to have the personality, willingness, and sensitivity towards people which suggested their potential as successful leaders, it seemed important to imbue these volunteers with self-confidence and an understanding that leading discussion is an art which can be mastered by practice.

We emphasized that the training workshops may help the discussion leader to become aware of the techniques and skills of competent leadership, but that the only way to develop proficiency was to take advantage of every opportunity to practice these skills.

By the third year of operation, the Program Supervisor had produced a comprehensive 63 page Handbook for Discussion Leaders which attempted to pull together in fairly brief form a description of some of the philosophy, skills, and techniques which had been found useful in conducting Living Room Learning groups. As the preface to the Handbook pointed out, "This information does not purport to be original . . . . the art of discussion was started several thousand years ago."

In 1961 this Handbook was reproduced by the Living Library Division of the Canadian Association for Adult Education and distributed nationally to the dozens of study-discussion groups springing up across Canada. Also used extensively was a "Study-Discussion Leaders Manual" published by The American Foundation for Continuing Education.

After some 3 years several other trainers had been developed and were assuming a larger share of the training responsibilities.

After the original Program Supervisor was transferred to other duties in 1961, subsequent Supervisors almost exclusively used this cadre of trainers (FDM Consultants of Vancouver) to conduct leadership workshops. However, by then the Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts was reaching its peak and only a minimum of new discussion leaders was required. Most communities already had a corps of trained and experienced Living Room Learning discussion leaders.

Mention should also be made of the eight-session study-discussion program developed by the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, and distributed by The Fund for Adult Education. This packaged program entitled "Leading Group Discussion" was often offered in larger regions as a Living Room Learning topic. Several hundred people were trained for other community activities. Out of these study-discussion groups, a number of additional leaders were recruited for Living Room Learning.

Finally, it should be noted that the leadership training workshops usually were conducted in central urban areas. It was found to be more economical, as well as a more stimulating educational experience, to pay the travel and accommodation expenses of workshop participants to enable them to travel from isolated areas to some more central location for training. In this way, isolated discussion leaders and Living Room Learning Coordinators had contact with volunteers from other regions and made to feel a part of a larger "movement".

There can be little doubt that a tremendous esprit-de-corps developed among the hundreds of volunteers who made Living Room Learning possible.

9. Preparation by the Participant

Three elements were considered essential for good group discussion: the group itself, skillful leadership, and a common body

of knowledge. The common body of knowledge was provided in a set of readings, together with visual aids and recordings for some of the topics.

We were, in concert with other institutions who organized this type of program, sensitive to charges that study-discussion under the guidance of lay leaders could be merely a pooling of ignorance. The packaged material was a crucial element in study-discussion programs. But equally important was the requirement that participants read in advance the sections appropriate for discussion at that particular meeting. This basic ground-rule was announced at every opportunity. We emphasized that every participant had a responsibility to read beforehand the material assigned, otherwise, we said, it was not fair to the other members that he take part in the discussion.

However, the participants were adults. There were times when other distractions made it impossible for them to complete the reading for the current session. We did not suggest that they stay away. Rather, we pointed out that they cannot get as much from the discussion if they have not done the reading. Since the boundaries of the discussion were set by the assigned readings, the non-reader could have a tendency to divert the discussion into a "bull-session" far removed from the subject matter for which other participants had prepared themselves.

Although many participants found any kind of discussion to be a stimulating and rewarding personal experience, we were concerned about maximizing their educational experience in Living Room Learning groups. The reading material for each topic was considered to be closely linked to the achievement of many of the aims of the Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts. While prior reading was emphasized, we also recognized that other adult responsibilities competed for the time of participants.

10. The Packaged Study-Discussion Program

Living Room Learning groups had a vociferous appetite for a wide variety of topics. Initially we were able to purchase a good variety of packaged programs from several sources. Examination of some of the available U.S. materials revealed that they were not particularly suited for Canadian audiences, (See Appendix "C") but many topics were well-received. Most of the packaged programs were distributed originally by educational foundations but eventually the production and distribution rights were assigned to commercial publishers and it became more difficult to keep track of sources.

At least 7 packaged programs were developed and tested by The University of British Columbia. Our second most popular topic, "Great Religions of the World" (second only to the all-time favorite, "The Ways of Mankind") was produced at UBC. In producing our own packaged programs, we had to keep in mind a number of principles.

The topic had to be discussible. It had to lend itself to examination and argument. There had to be room for different value-judgements and this made for the possibility of differences of opinion, which was the very essence of stimulating discussion and learning.

The material had to increase the reader's understanding of a given topic while at the same time encouraging him to think critically about it. Concepts needed to be examined but the implicit issues also needed thoughtful exploration.

Since we had decided to limit our topics to a ten-session program, we needed to split the topic into 10 logical, psychologically effective, discussible, and interrelated parts. The integrated whole was intended to provide for cumulative learning experiences, each session building upon previous sessions. Much of the reading was selected from existing materials, such as

paperback books which were purchased commercially, with sections specially written to introduce each section and to suggest some of the issues which are amenable to discussion.

Experiments sponsored by The Fund for Adult Education concluded that readings should be short (3,000 to 5,000 words per session) and involve substantial use of audio-visual material when the program was aimed at groups with only moderate skill in reading.

An integral and vital part of the packaged program was the leaders' guide. Having in mind that the discussion leaders usually were neither experts nor "well-read" in the subject matter, it was necessary for the companion guide to identify key concepts and issues which were to be given attention in each session as well as to suggest the kinds of questions which might evoke meaningful discussion.

Depending upon the suitability and extent of existing readings and the degree to which new, original material had to be created, packaged programs produced at UBC required an initial outlay of from $500 to $2000. For a popular topic, this initial cost was soon amortized over hundreds of copies of the package. Other topics which experienced less popularity could be a serious drain upon meagre financial resources. Material created by UBC usually was mimeographed, this format being considered the least expensive. Insipid mimeographing often was embellished by an attractive and printed cover design. The printing cost, coupled with the purchase of existing readings, would make for a total cost of between $3 and $7 per package. This cost compared favourably with the cost of purchasing ready-made packaged programs from other sources.

One additional aspect should be noted. It was necessary to maintain a fairly large inventory of packaged materials. At times this could represent an investment of up to $12,000 or one-half of the yearly budget. During later years arrangements were made for the University Bookstore to purchase, store, and distribute all the required packaged programs. This arrangement was fraught with

delays, high costs and situations of "out-of-stock", but there were compensating advantages for a small study-discussion staff and a meagre budget.

11. Audio-Visual Materials

The experience of experimental discussion projects supported by The Fund for Adult Education, suggested that a combination of communications media (e.g. reading and films, or reading and recordings) is desirable. Such combinations were found to provide a greater chance that all group members would have a background of information adequate for a good discussion. Films when used, were recommended to be short (20 to 30 minutes), to focus on people and the problems of people, or be graphic presentations of essential information. It was considered preferable to use them in the early programs of a discussion series.

Considerable success was had with recordings which were recommended to be brief (10 to 15 minutes) and dramatic. Experimental evidence suggested that recordings should be accompanied by a script which can be read as heard. The all-time favorite packaged program, "The Ways of Mankind", made extensive use of dramatic recordings.

Slides, on occasion were used to augment print and could serve as a substitute for expensive color plates in readings on art work. One humanities program even included a kit of postcard-size reproductions of famous paintings and architectural designs.

Many of the earlier packaged programs available from educational foundations were accompanied by audio-visual materials. However, almost all the packages produced at The University of British Columbia were comprised of readings. We did not have funds to produce special audio-visual materials. Neither did we have success in finding existing audio-visual material suitable to augment the topics we developed.

A more prominent reason for our lack of enthusiasm in using audio-visual aids was the utter difficulty of getting the necessary equipment transported to diverse groups and finding a competent operator. This became a major problem with films and film strips. Slides were easier to arrange because many group members had a 2" x 2" slide projector, and were willing to bring and operate it at the group meeting.

We found recordings to be the easiest to use. Simply by making certain that the host/hostess had a record player before confirming the location of certain study-discussion groups enabled us to cope with recordings. Reel-to-reel tape recordings were ruled out as an alternative because of the sparsity of equipment. The popular tape cassette of today might have been a boon in those earlier days.

12. Successful Promotional Techniques

The experience of Living Room Learning confirmed the principle that the most effective form of publicity is by word-of-mouth and personal contact on the part of previous participants. Their enthusiasm was contagious. To many participants it became almost a crusade to involve others in the unique kind of experience they had undergone. Their letters and visits to distant friends were certain to spread the spark of Living Room Learning to new communities. We received a number of enquiries from people who had heard about study-discussion from a friend and who urged that the program be introduced to their community. These same people often agreed to assist by becoming the local Living Room Learning Coordinator.

A typical range of publicity techniques was employed - newspaper stories, and occasionally an advertisement, radio and television interviews and announcements, brochures, personal letters, posters and talks to organizations. Printed material, such as brochures, leaflets, and posters, was designed and printed at the

university. Each season saw a new design or theme and this was applied to the whole province. No matter where you travelled in the province, Living Room Learning was equally identifiable.

Special mention should be made of two promotional techniques which were found to be exceptionally useful to introduce the program to a community, whether it be an urban neighborhood or a whole village. In areas with a population of less than about 20,000, Living Room Learning often was successfully launched by mailing a brochure to every household in the community. This "postal walk" technique required up to some 8,000 brochures in small towns. Urban neighborhoods also were selected for the "postal walk" technique and usually required about 3,000 brochures.

The average response to this type of blanket promotional mailing turned out to be about 1.5% or an average of 15 responses to every 1,000 brochures. Since the Extension Department was equipped to print brochures at nominal cost and since postage rates were much less in those years, a community could be blanketed with publicity material at a small cost.

The other very successful technique for attracting participants was the neighborhood coffee party. Held in the home of the host/hostess of a future study-discussion group, this neighborhood event provided an ideal atmosphere in which people could talk about the program and get some reassurance before registering in Living Room Learning. It also gave them an opportunity to meet other group members with whom they would be associated in the program. Invitations often were distributed wholesale by "postal walks" as well as by personal telephone to friends.

The neighborhood coffee party became essential for introducing and launching Living Room Learning in a new community. In the early years, the Program Supervisor was the featured guest at the coffee party, where he would talk about the program and its objectives, display and demonstrate the packaged materials, and answer questions. Later on, a 16 mm sound film was produced to demon-

strate a typical Living Room Learning group, and this film often was shown at the coffee party.

Eventually, the Living Room Learning Coordinators also made use of the neighborhood coffee party. It became indispensable in providing a link between initial contact and the eventual decision to register in a group.

13. Autonomous Groups

Over the years, a considerable number of autonomous study-discussion groups functioned. These included pre-established groups, clubs, or organizations who organized their own study-discussion group, or, particularly in remote regions, an independent group of friends or neighbors organized by some interested individual.

The Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts supplied packaged programs at cost to these autonomous groups, but little else, except perhaps advice and inspiration. Participant readings and a discussion leader's guide were sold at an average price of $6. Audio-visual materials were loaned without charge, with the autonomous group paying return shipping charges.

Autonomous groups or any community organization or individual were welcome to attend any nearby workshop for Living Room Learning leaders at a very nominal cost. Obviously, we did not encourage the operation of both autonomous study-discussion groups and publicly offer Living Room Learning groups in the same community. It was felt that such competition would be bound to cause confusion and ill-feeling between participants because of differences both in the costs and in the services and benefits.

However, in later years autonomous groups were encouraged by the development of reading lists and other material for a number of topics not included in Living Room Learning. These suggestions for

both group and individual study were developed in response to requests from individuals as well as from Living Room Learning groups who had been together for a number of years and who now wanted to continue independently by developing their own topics. With this type of arrangement, it became feasible for both regular Living Room Learning groups and autonomous groups to organize and function in the same community.

There are no records extant on the number of autonomous groups serviced over the years. However, since the demise of the Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts we annually hear about at least a couple of study-discussion groups functioning somewhere in British Columbia. Some of them still call their activity Living Room Learning and have perpetuated themselves year after year. This factor provides strong testimony to the fact that the study and discussion concept can fulfill a very useful need in any Canadian community.

14. The Fee Structure

When The University of British Columbia received a grant in 1957 to launch the study-discussion program in Canada, some ten "Test Centers" already had been functioning in the United States since 1954. These Centers were requested to charge fees of not less than $10 per individual and $18 per couple. The actual fee ranged from $10 to $14 per person, with a reduced fee for a married couple who shared one set of readings.

We established a fee of $10 per person, with a special fee of $15 for married couples who shared one package of readings. On a number of occasions we reviewed our fee structure but, after comparison with fees charged in other community and university adult education programs, and after discussion with Living Room Learning volunteers, we could only conclude that our fees already were the maximum acceptable. It may be unfortunate, but we never put this

conclusion to the test by trying a higher fee. Our decision in 1964 to discontinue the Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts, was predicated upon our considered opinion that the substantial fee increase required to pay for the program would not be acceptable to participants.

15. Expenses of Volunteers

A small honorarium was provided to each volunteer, based on the theory that this would emphasize the commitment which the volunteer had undertaken and that it might encourage greater responsibility in carrying out these voluntary tasks.

The Living Room Learning Coordinator received $10 for each study-discussion group formed in his community, plus free enrollment for the Coordinator and spouse in a group of their choice. In addition, the Coordinator was reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses such as postage, telephone, transportation (at 8¢ per mile), upon submission to the university of an official expense statement.

When the Coordinator had the assistance of an Advisory Committee, its members were enrolled free.

Those who hosted a Living Room Learning group and opened their home for the weekly meeting, were enrolled free. In addition, the hosts received a $10 expense cheque to help pay for coffee for the group.

The discussion leader and spouse were enrolled free and the leader received a $10 honorarium.

Thus, each Living Room Learning group required the expenditure of a total of $30 in honoraria and expenses. In addition, each free enrollment entailed the provision of a kit of reading material at a cost of between $4 and $6 per couple.

While many volunteers said that they would gladly assist without payment, others deemed the financial arrangements to be both

generous and fair. After making these token payments, the Program Supervisor had little hesitation in calling upon volunteers to expend considerable effort to keep the program functioning.

16. The Cost of the Total Operation

By 1962 a typical Living Room Learning group involved an expenditure of about $220. This was offset by revenue from fees of about $120. (See Appendix "D".) Subsidies had to be found elsewhere. For the first three years the grant from The Fund for Adult Education supported the program. Then, in 1960, the university incorporated the program into its regular Extension offering.

After the edict that the Extension Department must become substantially self-supporting, it became abundantly clear that the Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts could not continue without considerable subsidy. The annual cost of the program amounted to about $25,000. Some $13,000 - $15,000 was collected in fees. There was a yearly deficit of $10,000 to $12,000.

An increase in the number of programs or groups was no solution, because additional groups only increased the deficit. As already stated, we did not accept a fee increase as a viable solution. Besides, this solution would have required almost a doubling of the fee.

When faced with the stark possibility of disbanding the program, every conceivable and practical economy was considered. Even with drastic pruning of expenses, it was apparent that a minimum annual subsidy of at least $6,000 would need to be found in order to maintain the magnitude and scope of the program.

The university, faced with expanding costs generally, chose not to allocate scarce resources to subsidize a Study-Discussion Program in the Liberal Arts.

In 1964 the Program was discontinued.

Similar costing experience in study-discussion programs was reported by other institutions. In 1958, for example, the University of California (Los Angeles) reported expenses of $44,320 and fee income of $32,900. Whittier College reported $10,719 in expenditure and $4,291 in fees; while the University of Utah spent $12,081 and collected $7,764 in fees.

It appeared that no one had discovered the successful combination to make this type of university program financially self-supporting. Little remains today in North America of the exciting and burgeoning study-discussion program which used "packaged materials" and which flourished in the 1950's and 1960's.

APPENDIX A

Number of Groups, Participants, Communities, and Topics involved in the Study-Discussion Program in British Columbia

YEAR	Number of groups organized	Number of participants	Number of communities served	Number of topics offered
1957-58	29	346	3	11
1958-59	66	758	10	13
1959-60	102	1,303	42	17
1960-61	106	1,400	51	17
1961-62	126	1,488	66	*
1962-63	126	1,594	*	24
1963-64	131	1,500	47	*
1966-67	16	133	4	10
1967-68	4	42	1	4

* No record available.

Communities in British Columbia served by the Study-Discussion Program 1957-1968

Abbotsford
Armstrong

Bralorne
Burnaby

Campbell River
Castlegar
Chemainus
Chetwynd
Chilliwack
Comox
Courtenay
Cranbrook
Creston

Dawson Creek
Duncan

Enderby

Fort St. John
Fruitvale

Grand Forks
Greenwood

Haney
Hazelton
Hope

Kamloops
Kelowna
Kimberley
Kitimat

Ladner
Ladysmith
Langley
Lillooet

Merritt
Mission City

Nanaimo
Nelson
New Westminster
North Vancouver

Ocean Falls
Oliver
Osoyoos

Penticton
Port Alberni
Powell River
Prince George
Prince Rupert
Princeton

Quesnel

Revelstoke
Richmond
Robson
Rossland

Salmon Arm
Sardis
Sechelt
South Slocan
Summerland

Terrace
Trail

Vancouver
Vanderhoof
Vernon
Victoria

West Vancouver
Westview
White Rock
Williams Lake

Youbou

*

* Several additional communities are not identified in the extant records.

Sources of Packaged Study-Discussion Material

A. From The Fund for Adult Education
- The Ways of Mankind (with recordings)
- Ways to Justice (with recordings)
- An Introduction to the Humanities (with recordings)
- Looking at Modern Painting (with slides)
- Discovering Modern Poetry (with recordings)
- Economic Reasoning
- Parenthood in a Free Nation (with pamphlet kit)
- Aging in the Modern World
- Transition and Tension in Southeast Asia
- Leading Group Discussion

Plus a number of programs found not appropriate for Canada:
- You and Your Community
- Great Issues in American Politics
- Jefferson and Our Times
- The Power to Govern
- World Affairs are Your Affairs

B. From The American Foundation for Continuing Education
- World Politics
- Russian Foreign Policy
- Discussion Leaders Manual

Plus a number of programs found not appropriate for Canada:
- American Democracy
- Case Studies in American Politics

C. From Great Books Foundation
- Great Issues in Education

D. Miscellaneous
- World Peace through World Law

E. From CAAE "Living Library"
- Modern Drama for Discussion
- Shakespeare and His Theatre (with recordings and film)
- Philosophy in a Mass Age
- Canada in Folk Songs (with recordings)
- Canadian Theatre
- Southeast Asia: A Different Culture

F. Produced at The University of British Columbia
- Great Religions of the World (with filmstrips)
- Canada and World Affairs (with films)
- Mass Communication: A Major Social Force
- Ideas in Context
- The Vertical Mosaic
- Cities: A Study of Urban Problems
- Asia in Transition
- Handbook for Discussion Leaders

Typical Budget for a "Living Room Learning" Group

Expenditures

Packaged discussion materials 12 sets @ 4.50 average	$ 54
Share of the promotional costs:	
Printing of brochures $100	
Mailing costs 90	
Coffee Party promotion 20	
Other advertising 30	
Total of $140 resulting in 7 groups:	20
Share of discussion leader training cost: Weekend workshop total cost of $70 amortized over 7 groups:	10
Token expenses to host/hostess for coffee	10
Token expenses to discussion leader	10
Share of expenses of local Coordinator	10
Amortized cost of audio-visual materials	2
Shipping and express charges on materials	4
Amortized cost of annual visit of Program Supervisor to major communities: $70 for 7 groups	10
Share of salaries of Program Supervisor and office secretary: $13,500 shared by 150 groups:	90
TOTAL COST	$ 220

Income

6 single registrations @ $10	$ 60
4 married couples @ $15	60
TOTAL INCOME	$120

Based upon 1962 costs.

Based upon 14 paying members in the group (6 singles and 4 married couples on the average) plus a host and hostess and a discussion leader and spouse who pay no fee.

APPENDIX E

Program Supervisors of the Study-Discussion
Program in the Liberal Arts
Department of University Extension
The University of British Columbia

1957-61	Knute Buttedahl
1961-63	John P. Blaney
1963-64	Frederick E. Walden
1966-67	Philip E. Moir

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